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Larger Iraqi Engineer Role Planned In USACE's Gulf Region South District

By John Connor
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TALLIL, Iraq—The goal is an ambitious one—increasing the management responsibility of Iraqi engineers working for the Gulf Region South District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers by 25 percent by June 2008.

But Col. Steve Hill, the GRS commander, believes it's an achievable goal. "We've done the capacity building for our Iraqi engineers," Hill said. "We're just not using this to the fullest extent possible."

The goal of adding 25 percent to the management load of GRS' Iraqi associates by June 1 has been taking shape over a period of months. "This would be too hard" if the capacity didn't already exist, Hill said. "But it does exist. It's already on the ground." Some 143 engineers now work for GRS, which is engaged in reconstruction activities in the nine southern provinces of Iraq.

"We're not trying to create a separate Iraqi organization, but to more fully integrate Iraqi operations and capabilities into the overall GRS structure so we are able to make better use of our resources," Hill explained.

The goal fits into a broader mosaic and has a number of specific parts. The big picture, as described by Hill, includes the move to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in a number of the provinces covered by GRS.

It also includes a Corps of Engineers structure that is much the same as last year.

Project funding is a key aspect of the broader landscape, currently featuring money from the Economic Support Fund (ESF) and Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). Even if programs change, most participants in the reconstruction process agree, engineers and construction managers still will be needed given the huge amount of work remaining to be done to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure. The estimated cost of achieving a quality electricity system, for instance, is \$27 billion, of which only the U.S. Government has contributed \$4 billion.

Specific pieces to the Iraqi management enhancement plan include selecting several Iraqi area deputies; designating Lead Iraqi Associates to work hand-in-glove with maneuver units on their projects; having a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Resident Offices comprised solely of Iraqis; having an Iraqi personnel function; and selecting a coordinator for the lead Iraqi associates. Another important piece would be a PRT engineer with a cell of people, including an Iraqi associate engineer. All this isn't going to happen at once, Hill said, saying it must start with "baby steps."

Other contemplated pieces include an Iraqi Engineering and Construction chief,

an Iraqi Program and Project Management Division chief, and Iraqi Program Review Board, the first of which was held recently at Tallil. What's the right number of Iraqis" – "150 and up and you're ready to roll," Hill said. Lead Iraqi Associates could be moved into place from an existing pool of personnel, he added.

The end result over time could be a functional engineering and construction management enterprise that meets the enormous long-term needs of the Iraqi people, Hill said.

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